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ABSTRACT

In 1978, the Montgomery County (Maryland) public schools initiated an early admission (EA) pilot program that allowed 5-year olds to enter first grade. Two approaches were utilized: Under Plan I, a small number of 5-year olds entered regular grade 1 classes; under Plan II entire classes of 5-year olds attended school the full day, with the intention that they would cover both kindergarten and first grade curricula by year's end. Initial evaluation showed that only a small percentage of participating students in either group actually went on to be placed in grade 2. Further evaluation collected follow-up information on program graduates in first, second, or third grades. Most of the 21 children placed in grade 2 after the EA program experienced success. The remaining (approximately 280) children who were placed in grade 1 rated significantly higher than their non-EA classmates in both academic and social development. Difficulties were encountered in predicting achievement on the basis of standardized tests and teachers' ratings. These findings indicate that very few 5-year olds are ready for first grade, but that many children could benefit from a more enriched program than kindergarten presently provides. The evaluation also indicates the need for multiple criteria for identifying children ready for early placement. (Author/GC)

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MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Follow-up Study of Students in the Early Admission Program

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MARCH 1983

Edward Andrews
Superintendent of Schools

Prepared by the Department of Educational Accountability

MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF STUDENTS IN THE EARLY ADMISSION PROGRAM

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FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF STUDENTS IN THE EARLY ADMISSION PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In 1977, the Maryland state bylaw was changed to allow five-year-olds to enter first grade. In response to this change, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) developed a pilot program to identify selection criteria for early entrance to first grade and to examine the effects of early admission on students. In its two years of operation (1978-79 and 1979-80), the pilot program involved a total of ten schools and two approaches to early admission. In Plan I schools, a small number of five-year-olds were allowed, at the request of their parents, to enter regular Grade 1 classes. In Plan II schools, entire classes of five-year-old attended school the full day. It was intended that Plan II classes would cover the first grade as well as the kindergarten curriculum by the end of the year. All the children theoretically would be ready for placement in Grade 2.

FINDINGS

To study early admission, MCPS conducted an evaluation of the program while it was in effect and a follow-up of the former early admission students as they progressed through early elementary school. The findings for the first two years of operation of the Early Admission (EA) Program have been reported elsewhere.[1] In brief, the results were:

1. Only a small percentage of students were recommended for placement in Grade 2 after the Early Admission Program (16% for 1978-79; 7% for 1979-80). Even fewer were actually placed in second grade because some parents did not accept the recommendation.

2. Assessments conducted at the beginning and end of the EA program year showed that while on the average the EA students had not attained the achievement levels of one of the study's comparison groups, first graders in the same school, they were far ahead of a second comparison group, their peers in the half-day kindergarten.

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1. K. Hebbeler, J. Frechtling, and S. Frankel, Evaluation of the Early Admission to First Grade Program, Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland, April, 1980; and K. Hebbeler, Evaluation of the Second Year of the Early Admission Program. Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland, February, 1983.

3. The capability of several standardized group measures to select candidates for early admission was examined and none was found to be a particularly good predictor of end-of-year achievement. For instance, for Year 2 of the program, a group test was able to explain only 34 percent of the variance in reading achievement at the end of the year. The classroom teacher's ratings collected after one month of school were just as predictive as the standardized tests. Combining standardized test results with the teacher's rating did not improve predictability.

The last phase of the evaluation collected follow-up information on EA graduates in first, second, and third grade. Two groups of children were followed: those promoted directly to Grade 2 from the EA Program and those who went on to Grade 1 after their EA year. The purpose of the follow-up was to learn whether acceleration had any positive or negative effects for children promoted directly to Grade 2, to learn whether those children not accelerated had benefitted from EA participation, and to look at parents' and teachers' feelings about the Early Admission Program.

CHILDREN PLACED DIRECTLY IN GRADE 2 AFTER THE EARLY ADMISSION PROGRAM

The findings for children placed directly in Grade 2 after the Early Admissions Program present a mixed picture; however, the findings must be interpreted cautiously because of the small number of children involved (17 from 1978-79; 4 from 1979-80). The results were the following:

1. Most of the children promoted to Grade 2 experienced success in their accelerated placement. Their teachers felt that the children fitted in socially with their new classmates and were performing at a level appropriate for that grade.

2. A few children experienced problems in Grade 2. For some children, these problems were worked out over the year; however, three children (14%) were placed in Grade 2 for a second year.

3. Most of the parents reported that they were pleased with their child's experience in the Early Admission Program and felt that their child had not had any academic or social problems because of the accelerated placement.

The findings for children placed in Grade 1 after the Early Admission Program were very positive. The evaluation found that:

1. Teachers who received the EA graduates in their first and second year after the program rated them significantly higher in academic achievement and social development than their non-EA classmates. (While these results are encouraging, they cannot be unequivocally attributed to the EA Program because the children were not randomly selected for participation.) The teachers also reported that there were definite advantages and few problems caused by having the EA graduates in their classes.

2. One year after program participation, parents felt their child had received benefits from being in the EA Program, with academic benefits being the most frequently mentioned. Less than 20 percent felt their child had experienced any problems because of the program, and 90 percent would have enrolled their child again.

3. The EA students placed in Grade 1 outscored their non-EA classmates on the California Achievement Tests administered at the beginning of Grade 3. There were highly statistically significant differences between the EA and non-EA students on the Reading, Language, and Mathematics tests.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the several phases of evaluation of the Early Admission suggest several conclusions relevant to the formulation of a policy for admitting five year olds to first grade. The findings indicate that there will probably be very few children in any given kindergarten class who are academically and socially ready to be first graders. There may, however, be a much larger number of five-year-olds who could benefit from a more accelerated or enriched program than the present kindergarten experience provides.

Identification of the few children who are ready for first grade should be based on multiple criteria including standardized measures, teacher ratings, and classroom observation. Collection of teacher ratings, which were relatively useful predictors, would require placing all children in kindergarten for at least a short period of time at the beginning of the year so that teachers can become familiar with their students' strengths and weaknesses. The selection process will work best if the decision to place a child in first grade is portrayed as tentative with the very real possibility that the child may ultimately be more appropriately grouped with same-age peers.

Following the children who were accelerated provided information on the long-term effects of early admission. The students' academic and social progress in Grades 2 and 3 indicated that most children benefited from the acceleration, while others, a minority, did not fit in and could not negotiate the demands of being grouped with older children. No generalizations can be drawn as to how "children" will do when they are admitted early to first grade.

Lastly, one somewhat serendipitous but certainly definitive finding of the evaluations was the need for alternatives to the present half day kindergarten. The Early Admission Program was tremendously popular with parents, teachers, and principals--even though many had mixed to negative feelings about promotion to second grade. The program's appeal was due to the type of educational experience it provided for the students. Future planning for MCPS' youngest students should consider the unmistakable desire for alternatives to the kindergarten program as presently structured.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The state bylaw has given local boards of education the opportunity to develop a regulation permitting admission of a five-year-old to first grade. The need for this option exists in Montgomery County and a policy on early admission should be developed as soon as possible.

It is recommended that the decision to admit a five-year-old to first grade be primarily a school-level decision made jointly by the principal, kindergarten, and first grade teacher and the child's parents either at the school's or the parents' initiation. The criteria to be used in making this decision should include a standardized assessment of a child's skills and concepts, teacher ratings of intellectual and social development, and staff observation of classroom behavior. While the evaluation found many shortcomings with tests, test scores can be legitimately used as one way to learn about what a child can do. Because group tests are not good predictors with young children, test scores should not be used to exclude a child when other assessments indicate early admission is appropriate. The use of teacher ratings and observation of behavior in the classroom would require that all five-year-olds be admitted as kindergarteners with the understanding that the child would be assessed and observed and moved to first grade if such a move were in the student's best interest.

It is also recommended that flexibility be encouraged and schools adopt a variety of options for early admission. Some children with advanced reading or mathematics skills may belong with first graders for these subjects but may also need the social experiences of spending time with their own peer group. Movement for some subjects, half-day with the first grade, or combined K-1 classes are all options which should be encouraged as possible forms of early admission.

In sum, the findings of the evaluations of the Early Admission Program suggest that the Montgomery County Public Schools needs to develop a comprehensive approach to meeting the diverse needs of the county's five-year-olds. The current move to full-day kindergarten will meet some of the needs uncovered by the evaluation. Another area of concern was the content of the regular kindergarten program. Parents' and teachers' enthusiasm for the Early Admission Program was as much due to the unusual curriculum provided for the students as it was to the length of the day. Since the termination of the Early Admission Program, MCPS has revised the kindergarten curriculum. Implementation of these revisions may address some of the earlier concerns. A final element needed to provide a good introduction to school for the county's youngest students will be the adoption of a policy whereby some five-year-olds will be allowed to enter first grade.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE EARLY ADMISSION TO FIRST GRADE PROGRAM

On April 27, 1977, Maryland State Board of Education revised the state bylaw concerning admission to the first grade. The revised bylaw states:

> Every child admitted to the first grade in a public elementary school in a Maryland county shall be at least six years old on or before December 31 of the year in which he applies for entrance. A local board of education may adopt a regulation permitting a five-year-old child, upon request of the parent, to be admitted to the first grade if the local superintendent or his designee determines that the child has demonstrated capabilities warranting early admission. (Bylaw 13A.08.01A, General Regulations)

In August 1977, a small committee was appointed by the superintendent of the Montgomery County Public Schools to study the above state bylaw and to make recommendations concerning the feasibility of initiating a program of early admission into first grade. A set of suggested procedures was developed by this committee and presented to the Board of Education in a memorandum in November 1977. A program plan and associated evaluation suggestions, as revised by the Office for Instruction and Program Development and the Department of Educational Accountability, were approved in August 1978. The pilot program was implemented for the first time in the 1978-79 school year.

Two approaches to early admission were adopted for the program. In Plan I, a small number of five-year-olds were allowed, on request of their parents, to enter regular Grade 1 classes. Plan I was implemented in four schools in the first year of the project.

Plan II consisted of entire classes of five-year-olds who attended school for the full day. The children in these classes were to progress at their own rate through the kindergarten and first grade curricula. The expectation was that some children would master first grade material by the end of the year and could be promoted from the early admission class to second grade. Six schools had Plan II classrooms in 1978-79.

In April 1980, a report on the Evaluation of the Early Admission Program presented the findings for the first year of the project.[1] Some of the key findings for the evaluation were the following:

1. Only a small proportion of the early admission students (16%) were recommended for placement in Grade 2. Only 10 percent were placed in Grade 2 because the other children's parents declined the recommendation.

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1. The reader is referred to this report for a more detailed discussion of the history, philosophy, and implementation of the Early Admission Program. The report is available from the Department of Educational Accountability.

2. At the beginning of the school year, the achievement levels of the EA students were below those of the comparison first graders. This was also true at the end of the year. However, there were individual EA students whose achievement levels were higher than that of the average first grader.

3. The best predictor of whether an EA child would be recommended to Grade 2 was the child's score on the Metropolitan Readiness Test at the beginning of the year, but test scores explained only 31 percent of the variance in reading achievement at the end of the year.

4. The Early Admission Program was very favorably received by principals, teachers, and parents in spite of the fact that some staff and many parents were opposed to the idea of accelerating five-year-olds.

For the second year of the program, the number of schools participating in the program was reduced for budgetary reasons. Plan I and II were retained with the same structure. In the 1979-80 school year, there were two Plan I schools and three Plan II schools in Early Admission Program. The results for the second year were similar to those of the first year.[2]

1. Only 7 percent (N=9) of the early admission students were recommended for Grade 2. Only four students were actually placed in second grade the following year.

2. When compared to students in the half-day kindergarten (a comparison group added for the second year of the evaluation), the EA students scored significantly higher at the end of the year on the Reading, Language, and Mathematics tests of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. The first graders' average scores were higher than the EA students although the distribution did overlap, with a number of early admission students scoring as high or higher than first graders.

3. The best of the standardized tests was only able to explain 34 percent of the variation in reading achievement at the end of the year. The classroom teacher's ratings collected after one month of school were just as predictive as the standardized tests.

4. Parents, preschool teachers, and classroom teachers completed a behavior inventory to provide a measure of social development. The ratings from the different adults were not correlated, and only the classroom teacher's report predicted achievement at the end of the year.

5. Parents, teachers, and principals again were very positive and enthusiastic about the Early Admission Program.

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2. The complete findings are available from the Department of Educational Accountability.

FOLLOW-UP OF EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS

This report presents the results of a follow-up study of the two classes of children who were in the Early Admission Program. The purposes of the follow-up study were to:

1. Determine how the EA students promoted to second grade performed academically and socially in a placement with children a year older than themselves

2. Determine how the EA students placed in first grade performed academically and socially compared to their classmates from a regular half-day kindergarten program

3. Learn whether the first and second grade teachers experienced any instructional problems due to the presence of the EA graduates in their classrooms

Follow-up information was collected on the early admission graduates in first, second, and third grade to learn whether participation in the program had any long-range effects. The findings discuss the progress of four different groups of students; the EA classes of 1978-79 and 1979-80, a few of whom from both years were promoted to Grade 2, the remainder to Grade 1. The groups are the following:

- EA students of 1978-79; promoted to Grade 2
  (Followed through end of Grade 3)
- EA students 1978-79; promoted to Grade 1
  (Followed through beginning Grade 3)
- EA students of 1979-80; promoted to Grade 2
  (Followed through end of Grade 2)
- EA students of 1979-80; promoted to Grade 1
  (Followed through end of Grade 1)

The number of children in each group for each year along with the measures used to examine their progress is shown in Table 1.1.

Chapter 2 presents the findings for children promoted directly to second grade. Chapter 3 presents findings for children who were placed in first grade after the Early Admission Program.

TABLE 1.1

Follow-up on EA Graduates

1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82
in EA Program (N=153)	Grade 2 (N=17) Measures: Teacher Rating Parent Interview Stanford Reading Test	Grade 3 (N=11) Measures: Teacher Rating Parent Interview	Grade 4 (N=9)
	Grade 1 (N=130) Measures: Teacher Rating Teacher Interview Parent Interview	Grade 2 (N=107) Measures: Teacher Rating	Grade 3 (N=98) Measures: California Achievement Test
	in EA Program (N=79)	Grade 2 (N=4) Measures: Teacher Rating Parent Interview	Grade 3 (N=3)
		Grade 1 (N=70) Measures: Teacher Rating	Grade 2 (N=66)

Chapter 2

FINDINGS FOR EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS PLACED DIRECTLY IN GRADE 2

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings for the children placed directly to Grade 2 after their year in the Early Admission Program present a mixed picture. These findings, however, must be interpreted cautiously because of the small number of children involved (17 from 1978-79, 4 from 1979-80). Most of the children appear to have experienced academic success in their accelerated placement. Some did not, especially those from the EA class of 1979-80. In fact, three of the children promoted to second grade were placed in Grade 2 for another year. With regard to social development, the picture was much the same. Many of the children fitted in beautifully with their new classmates; a few did not seem to be able to adjust to the demands of second grade.

EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS IN GRADE 2

Second Grade Teachers' Assessment

Second grade teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire on student progress for each EA student they taught. Teachers of the 1978-79 EA children completed this questionnaire in midyear. Teachers of the 1979-80 EA children completed the questionnaire at the end of the year. The questionnaire asked teachers to indicate the student's achievement on a rating scale, to identify the child's relative standing in the class, and to comment on academic adjustment, social adjustment, and the wisdom of accelerating this child.

The teacher rating scale used in this questionnaire was also used to collect data for the evaluation at a number of different points in time and, therefore, will be referred to repeatedly throughout the report. The rating scale asked the teacher to indicate the functional grade level of the child in Reading/Language Arts, Arithmetic, General Academic, and Social/Emotional Behavior. The points on the rating scale were as follows:

Below Grade 1 1
Beginning Year Grade 1 2
Midyear Grade 1 3
End Year Grade 1 4
Beginning Year Grade 2 5
Midyear Grade 2 6
End Year Grade 2 7
Beginning Year Grade 3 8
Midyear Grade 3 9
End Year Grade 3 10
Beginning Year Grade 4 11
Midyear Grade 4 12
End Year Grade 4 13
Above Grade 4 14

The mean scores and range for the teacher ratings and class rankings are presented in Table 2.1. In the academic areas, the 1978-79 EA students were seen on the average as working between beginning of Grade 2 and midyear Grade 2 which was basically on grade level. However, as can be seen in the data on the ranges, some children were above this level and some were quite a bit below. The social ratings were slightly below the academic ones although the children were for the most part seen as behaving like second graders.

Teachers almost consistently placed the EA students in the top half of their classes. While two EA students were ranked in the lower half, both teachers commented that they had high average or gifted second graders and that the EA students were actually doing very well in their classrooms.

The teacher's responses to the question on the academic adjustment revealed the same pattern as seen with the ratings: most children were doing well, a few were not doing quite as well. A typical teacher report was: "No problems academically. Excellent work/study habits. No instructional problems."

TABLE 2.1

Teacher Rating and Rankings for
Early Admission Students in Grade 2

EA Class of 1978-79 [a]	Mean	Range
Teacher Ratings		
Reading/Language Arts	5.5	3 - 8
Arithmetic	5.8	5 - 7
General Academic	5.4	3 - 7
Social/Emotional Behavior	5.2	3 - 6
Relative Standing in Class	1.9	1 - 3

EA Class of 1979-80 [b]	Mean	Range
Teacher Ratings		
Reading/Language Arts	8.0	7-10
Arithmetic	7.0	7
General Academic	6.8	6- 8
Social/Emotional Behavior	6.0	4- 8
Relative Standing in Class	1.3	1- 2

Note: A teacher rating of "7" corresponded to "End Year Grade 2," a "6" to "Midyear Grade 2." See page 5 for more information. Relative standing was in quartiles with a "1" being the top quartile.

[a]Data collected January 1980. N=15

[b]Data collected May 1981. N=4

Five children seemed to have experienced slight academic difficulties which had been taken care of through adjustments in the instructional program. For 4 of the 17 children, placement in second grade had presented problems related to social adjustment. For the others, being in second grade appeared to present no adjustment problems. When teachers were asked whether they felt acceleration was a good thing for the child, the answer was unequivocally yes for eight children. For the other children, the teachers gave a variety of answers indicating the child was not performing up to the teacher's expectations or was experiencing some kind of problem.

Average ratings for the four 1979-80 students were numerically higher than the 1978-79 students' because of the timing of data collection. The children as a group were on or above grade level in academic subjects but slightly below in social/emotional behavior. Three of the children were placed in the top quarter of their class; the other child was in the second quarter. Teachers of three of the four children commented that the children had experienced problems adjusting to the academic requirements of second grade, e.g., "feels frustrated because he works slowly," "needs constant monitoring to keep her on task." Even though all the children were rated as being on a second grade level, only one child's teacher believed that acceleration had been good for the student.

Parents' Feelings

At the end of the second grade, telephone interviews were conducted with the parents of the students. Twelve of the seventeen 1978-79 parents could be reached for interview; six of these were parents of Plan I students, six were parents of Plan II students. Three of the four 1979-80 students' parents could be reached for the telephone interview.

The interviews showed that for the most part the 1978-79 parents were very pleased with their child's EA experience and also felt their child had done well in Grade 2. All 12 of the parents thought their child had benefitted from the EA Program. Benefits listed included an eagerness for learning, good academic achievement, and general happiness.

All but 1 of the 12 parents said they would enroll their child in the Early Admission class if they had it to do over again. Parents felt their child was ready for the program and would have been bored in a regular kindergarten. Here are some examples of answers parents gave when asked why they would enroll their child in the EA class again:

> Because she would have been bored to tears with regular kindergarten work and it would not have been challenging for her.
>
> Because he worked hard at Montessori. He was ready for it. He wasn't happy in kindergarten.

The one parent who was undecided as to whether he or she would enroll the child in the EA Program again was dissatisfied because of a feeling that the child "was not well grounded in the fundamentals."

Most parents (9 of the 12) felt being in second grade had not caused any academic problems for their child. Only one parent thought the problem that did exist was serious and had not been corrected by the end of the year. Overall, the results of the interviews suggest that from the 1978-79 parents' vantage point, the EA class had been a good, almost a necessary, experience for their child. Most of them felt that their child had continued to do well in Grade 2 and was experiencing no problems.

The results of the parent interviews with the 79-80 parents must be viewed cautiously because of the small number of parents (N=3). Two of these parents had mixed feelings about their child's accelerated placement and were unsure as to whether they would enroll their child in the EA Program if they had it to do over again. The other parent was completely positive about the decision and their child's present placement. All parents agreed that the child had benefited from the EA Program.

Stanford Reading Test

The Stanford Reading Test was administered systemwide to second graders in September 1979.[3] The results were used to answer two questions about the EA students in Grade 2. The first question was what was the EA child's achievement level relative to his or her second grade classmates in that school. The second was what were the achievement levels of the EA students compared to national norms.

To compare each EA child in Grade 2 to his or her classmates, the within school quartiles ranges for each subtest were tabulated. A child in the fourth (top) quartile would have scored high compared to the other children in that school's second grade. Table 2.2 presents the percentage of EA students in each quartile for all subtests.

TABLE 2.2

Within School Quartiles of EA Students in Grade 2
on Stanford Reading Test

	Vocabulary	Reading A	Reading B	Word Study	Reading A & B
Fourth Quartile	31	50	38	44	44
Third Quartile	25	13	19	25	13
Second Quartile	25	25	38	19	31
First Quartile	19	13	6	13	13

Note: Table entries are percentage of 1978-79 EA students in respective quartile for their school. N=16.

3. The test was not administered in 1980 and, therefore, results are not available for the 1979-80 EA students.

Across the subtests between one third and one half of the EA second graders scored in the top quartile for their schools. For all subtests, over half of the EA second graders were above the median for second graders in their school. A few of the EA second graders did not do so well. On the Vocabulary Subtest, 19 percent (N=3) were in the bottom quartile for their school as were 13 percent (N=2) for the Reading A, Word Study, and Reading A & B scores.

Using the national norms as the standard of comparison suggests again that some EA students were performing at exceptionally high levels, others were doing well, and a few others (4 or 5) were performing below average for second graders (see Table 2.3). For all subtests, over 50 percent of the EA second graders scored above the 80th percentile.

TABLE 2.3

National Percentiles of EA Students in Grade 2
on Stanford Reading Test

National Percentile	Vocabulary	Reading A	Reading B	Word Study	Reading A & B
80-99	50	69	50	69	57
60-79	12	6	19	6	19
40-59	31	6	12	6	6
Below 40	6	19	19	19	19

Note: Table entries are percentage of 1978-79 EA students in each percentile category. N=16.

EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS IN GRADE 3

Eleven of the 1978-79 students were enrolled as third graders for 1980-81. Three of the seventeen 1978-79 students who were placed directly in Grade 2 repeated Grade 2. The other three left the public school system.

Third Grade Teachers' Assessments

Third grade teachers rated the 1978-79 children at the end of the school year on an evaluation form identical to the one that had been used by their second grade teachers in the previous year.

The average teacher rating in all four areas was "End of year Grade 3" to "Beginning of Year Grade 4" which was exactly on grade level (see Table 2.4). The highest average rating was in Reading/Language Arts (10.8) followed by General Academic Skills (10.5), Arithmetic (10.1), and Social/Emotional Behavior (10.0). The lowest rating given a child was a 5 (Beginning Year Grade 2) in Social/Emotional Behavior; the highest was a 14 (Above Grade 4) in Reading and Social/Emotional.

TABLE 2.4

Teacher Ratings and Ranking for
Early Admission Students in Grade 3

	Mean	Range
Teacher Rating		
Reading/Language	10.8	9-14
Arithmetic	10.1	9-10
General Academic	10.5	9-13
Social/Emotional Behavior	10.0	5-14
Relative Standing in Class	1.4	1- 3

Note: A teacher rating of "10" corresponded to "End Year Grade 3," an "11" to "Beginning Year Grade 4." See page 5 for more information. Relative Standing was in quartiles, with a "1" being top quartile. N=11.

The average quartile was 1.4 or somewhere between the top and second quarter. For 8 of the 11 children, their teachers said they were in the top quarter of their class.

Teachers' comments on the child's academic adjustment to third grade showed that almost all the children were doing well. Typical of teachers' comments were "super student" and "leader, helpful to other students, achieves well." Teachers' comments on social adjustments also gave indications of good adjustment with two exceptions. For most children, their teachers felt they were well accepted by their peers and had many friends. The two exceptions had problems related to immaturity. One of these children was in a 3-4 combination so some of her classmates were two years older which appeared to cause her some problems. The teachers of these two children expressed the belief that acceleration had not been good for the child. All other teachers felt that the child's present grade placement was appropriate and that the decision to accelerate had been a good one for the child.

Parents' Feelings

Only 8 of the 11 EA third graders' parents could be contacted for a telephone interview. Unfortunately, the parents of the two children whose teachers said they experienced social problems were among the three not interviewed. Seven of the eight parents contacted felt (1) their child had benefited from the Early Admission Program, (2) their child had not experienced academic or social problems, and (3) they would enroll their child in the EA Program again. One parent felt the child had experienced a lot of anxiety as a result of acceleration. All parents agreed that their child should be placed in fourth grade. Many of the parents commented at the end of the interview that the EA Program was a good idea and should be continued.

Chapter 3

FINDINGS FOR EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS PLACED IN GRADE 1

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Information collected on children placed in Grade 1 after the EA Program presented a very positive picture. Teachers rated the EA graduates significantly higher than their non-EA classmates in Reading, Arithmetic, General Academic, and Social/Emotional Behavior. This was true for the EA class of 1978-79 in first and second grade and for the EA class of 1979-80 in first grade (all the points at which data were collected). Interviews with first grade teachers showed that the teachers found advantages to having the EA students in their classrooms and experienced few problems with them. A year after their child participated in the EA Program, most parents felt that their child had received benefits. Few parents saw any problems and most said they would enroll their child again. On the California Achievement Tests, administered in Grade 3, the EA students scored significantly higher than their non-EA classmates. Each of these findings will be discussed below.

EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS IN GRADE 1

First Grade Teachers' Assessments

In January 1980, first grade teachers in the 1978-79 EA schools were given their own class list and asked to rate each student using the previously described scale. The same data were collected for the EA class of 1979-80 in May 1981. Even though the EA students were not identified on the rating sheet, the teachers were not providing "blind data" with regard to student achievement. It is reasonable to assume the teachers were aware of which class the students had been in last year. The teachers also knew the ratings were being collected as part of the evaluation of the Early Admission Program.

Table 3.1 presents the mean ratings and relative standing for the former EA and non-EA students. The data for both years show the same pattern although the actual ratings are different because the ratings were collected at different times during the school year. In all four areas, the EA students were given significantly higher ratings. The difference is greatest in the academic areas. In Reading, the average ratings for the EA students were a full half-year ahead of the average for the non-EA students. The smallest differences, although still statistically significant, were found for social development. The relative standing indicated that the average for the EA students was a ranking between the top and the second quarter of the class. For the non-EA students, the average was between the second and third quarter.

It should be noted that the differences between the groups in first grade cannot be unequivocally attributed to participation in the Early Admission Program because the children were not randomly assigned to the program. It is quite possible that the parents of the most advanced children nominated their children for the EA class. Beginning-of-the-year assessments collected in September 1979 with the 1979-80 EA class and their half-day kindergarten peers indicated that the EA children on the average were indeed a higher performing group when they first started school.

TABLE 3.1

Teacher Ratings for EA and
Non-EA Students in Grade 1

EA Class of 1978-79[a]	Mean: Former EA Students (N=100)	Mean: Non-EA Students (N=268)	p
Teacher Rating			
Reading/Language Arts	3.8	2.7	.001
Arithmetic	3.8	3.1	.001
General Academic	3.5	2.8	.001
Social/Emotional Behavior	3.2	2.8	.001
Relative Standing in Class	1.8	2.7	.001

EA Class of 1979-80[b]	Mean: EA Students (N=65)	Mean: Non-EA Students (N=196)	p
Teacher Rating			
Reading/Language Arts	5.2	4.1	.001
Arithmetic	5.1	3.9	.001
General Academic	5.0	3.9	.001
Social/Emotional Behavior	4.5	3.9	.001
Relative Standing in Class	1.9	2.7	.001

Note: A teacher rating of "3" corresponded to "Midyear Grade 1", a "4" to "End-Year Grade 1." See page 5 for more information. Relative standing was in quartiles, with a "1" being top quartile.

[a]Data collected January 1980.
[b]Data collected May 1981.

First Grade Teachers' General Impressions

Shortly after completing the individual student ratings, the 22 first grade teachers who had early admission students from 1978-79 in their classes were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to provide an opportunity for the teachers to talk in general about the academic achievement and social development of the EA students and to learn whether the presence of the EA students in their classrooms presented any advantages or problems.

While the teachers' responses can be summarized in general terms, there were striking contrasts between answers from different teachers, even between teachers in the same school. Although most teachers evaluated the EA students' academic achievement positively compared to their classmates, some emphasized that there were no differences. Some teachers found former EA students to be more mature; a few teachers said they were disruptive.

Three points need to be kept in mind in interpreting the teacher's comments about the early admissions graduates. First, their comments are based on the particular children in their class and sometimes that was only one or two children. This could explain some of the contrasting reports. Second, some of the teachers' answers appeared to reflect their opinion of early admission as a concept and their opinion of the early admission teacher rather than of the students themselves. Third, just as with the data presented in the previous section, any differences between the groups could just as reasonably be due to differences that existed before the children entered school and are not necessarily due to participation in the Early Admission Program.

Teachers were asked to compare the early admission students with their classmates from the half-day kindergarten and with other first graders they had taught in the past. (All teachers interviewed had taught first grade before.) Twenty of the 22 teachers felt the EA students were better in one way or another; the remaining two teachers thought there were no differences. Eighteen teachers made positive statements concerning the children's academic achievement; nine were emphatic or found substantial differences.

When asked to compare the EA students socially to their half-day classmates and to other first graders they had taught in the past, nine of the 22 teachers felt the EA students were more advanced in some way. Most saw no differences. Two teachers described the social development of the EA students in negative terms but indicated that they found them to be typical first graders.

Excerpts from the teachers' comments follow (the second and third teachers are from the same school):

A teacher who gave the EA students a positive evaluation:

> Classmates look up to the EA kids. Definite leadership qualities. Very mature. Able to handle more work.

A teacher who gave the EA students a positive evaluation:

> Get along with other kids better. More mature, sociable. Better listeners. Longer attention spans. More polite.

A teacher who described the EA students negatively but considered them typical:

> Poor listeners. Very distractible. Very immature. Basically are average first graders socially-nothing distinct.

Fifteen of the teachers said there were advantages to having the EA students in their classes. Over half of these teachers indicated that one of the advantages was that the EA students helped the other students in the class. Other advantages were that they made the teacher's job easier (because they helped out and because they knew the basics), they made the teacher's job more enjoyable, they were better behaved, they anticipated and discussed more, and they were able to work alone.

Thirteen of the teachers felt there were problems associated with having the EA students in their classes. The most frequently mentioned problem was the children's parents. Teacher's thought the parents felt that their EA "kids are geniuses and put that stigma on them that follows them through school" and that the parents treated their children as second graders and felt they could handle second grade work. One teacher complained that the parents tended to be critical, "very on top of the situation" and "around a lot asking questions."

One predictable problem that a mixture of EA and half-day kindergarten students might present for a teacher is a wide range of skill levels. Difficulties related to varying levels were only mentioned by four teachers. Some teachers felt that there were gaps coming into first grade because the "kids from EA read too high for the rest of the first graders" or that the gap "makes it hard for the teacher to teach." The teachers in one school suggested that the Early Admission Program should build in meetings for the first grade teachers to provide them the opportunity to discuss these students.

Any teacher who had a child in her class who was recommended for second grade but placed in first was asked to report individually on this child's progress. The teachers were also asked whether they felt second grade would have been more appropriate for the child. Of the eight children asked about, six were reported to be doing fine, and two were having slight problems. For only one child did a teacher indicate that she thought second grade would have been a more appropriate placement. This teacher was trying to get the parents to place the child in third grade next year.

Parents' Feelings

At the end of the school year, telephone interviews were conducted with 42 parents of EA students from 1978-79 in Grade 1. The sample consisted of all the parents of Plan I students in Grade 1 (N=6), all the parents who had turned down a recommendation for second grade (N=7 including a Plan I parent) and a random sample of five parents from each of the six Plan II schools (N=30).

The results of the parent interviews are presented in Table 3.2. The examples given in parentheses after the categories of responses for the open-ended questions are actual quotations from the parents. The overwhelmingly majority of the parents surveyed (86%) felt that their child had received benefits as a result of being in the EA class. The benefit listed most often was some type of academic benefit (52%) followed by benefits related to preparation for later learning (31%).

Very few parents (N=8 or 9%) had any problems with the Early Admission Program. Four of these eight parents were from the same school. There appeared to be little consistency to the problems mentioned.

The parents' support for the Early Admission Program was further evidenced in their response to the question of whether they would enroll their child again. Ninety percent said they would. Their reasons for this decision parallel some of the advantages listed above. The parents liked the program because they felt their child was "ready for it" (21%) and because it was challenging (21%). Three of the four parents who would not have enrolled their child again were from the same school. Not surprisingly, all of these parents had cited problems with the program.

The seven parents who had placed their child in Grade 1 despite the school's recommendation for Grade 2 were asked how they felt about that decision. Six parents still felt their decision had been the correct one. The other parent saw advantages and disadvantages with either course of action.

At the conclusion of the formal questioning, the parents were asked if there was anything else they would like to say about the Early Admission Program. Forty of the parents volunteered additional comments. Many parents took the opportunity to express support for the program and to commend the teacher. Some of the parents said they were confused about program objectives, being unsure as to whether the program was to be all-day kindergarten or a first grade. Several parents expressed the opinion that the program should be expanded and be made available countywide. A few offered advice as to how program should operate; several parents mentioned the importance of screening in particular. Parent comments follow:

- A lot of kids would benefit from an all day kindergarten class with advanced work in the morning and play in the afternoon.
- They should carefully screen the children to make sure they are emotionally ready for it.
- I am so positive about it. There was not one thing I didn't like. I hope to see it as the norm for kindergarten.
- I wish it had come sooner and I hope other children could benefit from the K-1 program.
- I hope they continue it and don't stop it because I think it is great. They are doing more things with kids.
- I think her teacher is fantastic and made a big difference.
- I think it should be countywide for everyone who wants it and for the children who are ready for it.
- I'm sorry it was not feasible to extend the skill development activities in the first grade so it would not be a repeat of K-1 in the first grade class. I wish there were more of a long-range program.

TABLE 3.2

Results of Interviews with Parents of 1978-79 EA Students in Grade 1

	Percentage of Parents (N=42)
Do you see any benefits to your child this year from having participated in the Early Admission Program last year?	
Yes	86
No	12
Undecided	2
If yes, what benefits?*	
Academic (e.g., "above average in reading")	52
Good preparation (e.g., "better prepared for first grade")	31
Work habits/attitudes (e.g., "likes to learn")	24
Social (e.g., "confident")	19
Other (e.g., "teachers helped him last year")	10
No benefits given	14
Do you see any problems for your child this year from having participated in the Early Admissions Program last year?	
Yes	19
No	81
Undecided	0
If yes, what problems?*	
EA was too difficult academically (e.g., pressure...to read")	7
Insufficient social development (e.g., "needed more time socially")	7
EA didn't cover enough material (e.g., "didn't get a good amount of information")	5
Teacher (e.g., "teacher was a problem")	5
Other (bored, stigma of staying in Grade 1)	5
No problem	81
If you had it to do over again would you have enrolled your child in the Early Admission class?	
Yes	90
No	10
Undecided	0
If yes, why?*	
General readiness (e.g., "ready for it")	24
Challenge (e.g., "K-1 was more challenging")	21
General benefits (e.g., "a lot of children can benefit from it")	21
Academic (e.g., "got a lot out of it academically")	19
Whole day (e.g., "liked going to school for a whole day")	19
Good preparation (e.g., "gave them a good background")	17
Social benefits (e.g., "ready socially")	10
Other (teacher, work habits)	10
Would not do it again	10
If not, why not?*	
Teacher	5
Other (unequal attention for all children, overemphasis on academics)	5
Would do it again	90

*Percentages may not total 100 because parents could offer more than one answer.

EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS IN GRADE 2

Only the teacher ratings were collected for the 1978-79 students who were enrolled in Grade 2 for school year 1980-81. Ratings were collected at the end of the year. The results are presented in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3

Teacher Ratings for EA and Non-EA Students in Grade 2

	Mean		
	Former EA Students (N=89)	Non-EA Students (N=505)	p
Teacher Rating			
Reading/Language Arts	8.0	6.6	.001
Arithmetic	7.6	6.7	.001
General Academic	7.6	6.5	.001
Social/Emotional Behavior	7.2	6.7	.001
Relative Standing	1.8	2.5	.001

Note: A teacher rating of "6" corresponded to "Midyear Grade 2," a "7" to "End Year Grade 2." See page 5 for more information. Relative standing was in quartiles, with a "1" being top quartile.

The findings parallel those seen with the teacher ratings for these children when they were first graders. The EA students were given an average rating above grade level in all four areas. Reading was the best area with an average rating equivalent to "Beginning of the Year Grade 3." In all four areas, the former EA students were rated significantly higher than their classmates who had not been through the EA program. The average standing in class for the EA graduates was between the top and second highest quartile. For the non-EA students, it was between the second and third.

EARLY ADMISSION STUDENTS IN GRADE 3

The only data available on the Early Admission students in Grade 3 are their scores on the California Achievement Tests which were administered to all MCPS third graders in the fall of 1981. The test results for the six Plan II schools[4] were analyzed to compare 1978-79 EA and non-EA students. The data are presented in Table 3.4. There were highly statistically significant differences between the EA and non-EA students for all of the tests. On the three subtests (Reading, Language, and Mathematics) and on the total score, the former EA students outscored their classmates who had not been in the program.

TABLE 3.4

California Achievement Test Scores
for 1978-79 EA and Non-EA Students in Grade 3

	Mean Scale Scores		
	Former EA Students (N= 80)	Non-EA Students (N= 361)	p
Reading	433	401	.001
Language	484	453	.001
Mathematics	397	376	.001
Total Battery	415	388	.001

4. Cashell, Takoma Park, Twinbrook, Stedwick, Whetstone, and Wyngate.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EVALUATIONS OF THE EARLY ADMISSION PROGRAM

The Early Admission Program is no longer in operation, and it has now been five years since the state bylaw was first changed to allow five-year-olds to enter first grade. The need, however, still exists for a policy on early admission and several critical questions will need to be answered as part of its the formulation. These include (1) can five-year-olds do first grade work and cope with the emotional demands of an accelerated placement, (2) how does one identify children who should be admitted early, and (3) does acceleration have any long-range beneficial or harmful effects? The evaluations of the Early Admission Program contained many results pertinent to these questions. The evaluation results also have implications for the operation of alternative programs for five-year-olds.

FIVE-YEAR-OLDS AND FIRST GRADE

The evaluation results suggest a typical incoming kindergarten class will be made up of a very few children who are academically and socially ready for first grade and a larger number who are capable of first grade work academically but still have the emotional and social needs of an average five-year-old. The general consensus of the principals and teachers who were involved with the Early Admission Program was that there would be only a few children who should be accelerated. The small number of recommendations for Grade 2 placement at the end of the year was consistent with this prediction. The achievement test results for the Plan II children showed that a larger number of five-year-olds had attained achievement levels near or above those of the average first grader. Socially, however, these children may have been more like kindergarten children as seen by the fact that teachers consistently rated their class's social development as less advanced than their academic achievement.

SELECTING CHILDREN FOR EARLY ADMISSION

If MCPS elects to allow five-year-olds to enter first grade either as part of a special program or as part of a regular first grade classroom, a set of selection criteria will need to be developed. The easiest solution to the problem of selection criteria would be to identify one or more tests, administer the tests, and admit any children who score above a certain score. The problem with this approach is that instruments which can be easily administered to five-year-olds do not have sufficient predictive validity to justify using them as the sole basis for this kind of decision making. In the first year of the program, the Metropolitan Readiness Tests were administered at the beginning of the year. Several tests from the CIRCUS battery were administered in the second year. Neither proved to be consistently accurate as a predictor; even the best of the tests would misclassify a number of children. Some children who scored relatively high at the beginning of the year were not so high at the end and vice versa.

One especially important finding related to the search for screening criteria was that the teacher's ratings of the students after one month of school were just as predictive of end-of-year achievement as were the standardized tests. Furthermore, teachers' informal evaluations of the children are less costly and much easier to collect.

Two factors the evaluation found to be unsuitable as criteria were age in September and preschool experience. The "older five-year-olds" did not turn out to be the better achievers at the end of the year. Amount of preschool experience also did not predict achievement. Probably "preschool experience" is not one factor but many. The overwhelming majority of the children had preschool experience; the significant variable may have been what that experience was like. Type may be more important than quantity and categorizing "type" as part of a screening process would not be practical.

What then can the evaluations contribute to developing procedures for admitting five-year-olds to first grade? The results suggest the best approach may be the use of multiple criteria, most of which could be collected through the kindergarten teacher. Such an approach would probably necessitate placing all children in kindergarten and moving some children at a later date. Although the assessment could be made before school entrance, it is probably more efficient for teachers to come to know children in the classroom. An evaluation based on classroom behavior is also likely to be more accurate since it is performance in that setting which is of interest.

The Early Admission teachers supplied a number of indicators based on their two years with the program which they felt should be considered in making an early admission decision. These included good academic skill development, good language skills, good attention span, the ability to follow directions, good fine and gross motor development, and the ability to work independently.

The findings of the evaluation also suggest that the selection of children for early admission should be viewed as a tentative decision. A willingness to rethink earlier decisions may be the only way to compensate for the fact that even the most astute teachers are likely to be wrong about some children (just as the standardized instruments would be). The safest approach for the school and the parents to take would be to view the entire early admission year as a trial period with a possibility of first or second grade placement the following year. As the evaluation findings showed, there are no sure predictions where five-year-olds are concerned.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF AN ACCELERATED PLACEMENT

The evaluation followed the children who were accelerated to the end of third grade. The follow-up results present a mixed picture. For some children, placement in Grade 2 after the Early Admission Program appears to have been a wise decision. Teachers and parents reported that children were doing well academically and fitted in nicely with their older peer group. For these children placement with their agemates without any other alteration of their program probably would have left them bored.

For other children, a minority of those accelerated, the placement presented some problems. A few children's academic achievement was not sufficient for their new grade. Some children were immature, anxious, or had difficulty completing assignments. A few of the accelerated students were placed in Grade 2 for a second year. The only generalization suggested by the follow-up results is that for some children acceleration is an excellent idea, for some it is a mix of good and bad features, and for others it is a mistake.

OPERATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM FOR FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

The Early Admission Program represented a unique alternative to the traditional half-day kindergarten. The day was twice as long and the curriculum was more academically oriented. These variations resulted in a program which was tremendously popular with teachers and parents. One of the principals' key problems with the program was its popularity; too many parents wanted to enroll their child. Much of the Program's appeal had nothing to do with preparing children for second grade at the end of the year. In fact, possibility of acceleration was a neutral to negative feature. On a day-to-day basis, "early admission" was a misnomer. The alternate name of "K-1" which was used in several of the schools was probably a more appropriate descriptor.

The end-of-year data after the second year of the program suggest the enthusiasm was justified. The EA children outscored their half-day kindergarten peers even when beginning-of-the-year differences were controlled statistically. The follow-up data on children promoted to Grade 1 from the EA classroom were equally positive. Teacher ratings in first and second grade significantly favored the EA graduates in the areas of Reading, Arithmetic, General Academic, and Social/Emotional Development. Even a year after their child left the program, parents were unequivocal in their support for it. In Grade 3, EA graduates outscored their classmates who had not been in the program on all subtests of the California Achievement Tests.

Taken as a whole, the findings on the reception and impact of the Early Admissions Program suggest a substantial need for exploring alternatives to the traditional kindergarten in MCPS. The parents saw their children as "ready for more" possibly because nearly all of the children had had preschool experience. The teachers saw the children as "sponges" who were "eager to learn". Such receptivity appears well matched to a alternative program such as Early Admission--even if the objective of promotion to second grade is not part of the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The state bylaw has given local boards of education the opportunity to develop a regulation permitting admission of a five-year-old to first grade. The need for this option exists in Montgomery County, and a policy on early admission should be developed as soon as possible.

It is recommended that the decision to admit a five-year-old to first grade be primarily a school-level decision made jointly by the principal, kindergarten and first grade teacher, and the child's parents either at the school's or the parents' initiation. The criteria to be used in making this decision should include a standardized assessment of a child's skills and concepts, teacher

ratings of intellectual and social development, and teacher observation of classroom behavior. While the evaluation found many shortcomings with tests, test scores can be legitimately used as one way to learn about what a child can do. Because group tests are nct good predictors with young children, test scores should not be used to exclude a child when other assessments indicate early admission is appropriate. The use of teacher ratings and observation of behavior in the classroom would require that all five-year-olds be admitted as kindergarteners with the understanding that the child would be assessed and observed and moved to first grade if such a move were in the student's best interest.

It is also recommended that flexibility be encouraged and schools adopt a variety of options for early admission. Some children with advanced reading or mathematics skills may belong with first graders for these subjects but may also need the social experiences of spending time with their own peer group. Movement for some subjects, half-day with the first grade, or combined K-1 classes are all options which should be encouraged as possible forms of early admission.

In sum, the findings of the evaluations of the Early Admissions Programs suggest that the Montgomery County Public Schools needs to develop a comprehensive approach to meeting the diverse needs of the county's five-year-olds. The current move to full-day kindergarten will meet some of the needs uncovered by the evaluation. Another area of concern was the content of the kindergarten program. Parents' and teachers enthusiasm for the Early Admission Program was as much due to the curriculum provided for the students as it was to the length of the day. Since the termination of the Early Admission Program, MCPS has revised the kindergarten curriculum. Implementation of these revisions may address some of the earlier concerns. A final element needed to provide a good introduction to school for the county's youngest students will be the adoption of a policy whereby some five-year-olds will be allowed to enter first grade.

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